

6 FEB: BIGGEST EVER NHS STRIKE

UNITE ALL THE STRIKES

- Save our NHS
- Kick out the Tories
- All out on Budget Day, 15 March

GARETH BROMHALL

AMBULANCE SERVICE WORKER, SWANSEA

6 February will be the biggest strike in NHS history.

Working in the NHS in 2023 means working in a system that has been systematically underfunded, understaffed, and bled dry by profiteers. It's not a system that has failed, it's a system that is being failed.

As a worker in the ambulance service, I see daily the results of decades of these ideological attacks on the NHS.

One of the biggest reforms won by the working class in our history, and once the envy of the world, we now see beds blocked due to savage cuts in social care, days spent waiting in corridors until beds become available, and paramedics spending whole shifts sat in ambulances outside emergency departments.

Recently, on a picket locally, I heard of some crews working a full shift in the back of an ambulance, going home to rest and coming back the next day to the same patient, in the same ambulance for half of the next day.

When NHS workers see headlines about safe staffing on strike days, or mandated minimum service levels - stripping us of our right to strike - we know the reality of our wards, our clinics, and contact centres where safe staffing is so often far from achieved - or only achieved by paying billions to private sector agencies while NHS vacancies continue to mount.

This is why I have taken two days of strike action since December, and why I am taking four more over the next two months. I see my pay packet being worth less month on month, I see colleagues leaving and recruitment faltering.

Talk of strike action is ever-present in my workplace, where three unions are currently taking action and a fourth is balloting. The 6 February will see GMB, Unite and Unison in the ambulance service, and the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) striking together in England and Wales, in a step forward for coordinated action in the health service.

Budget Day, 15 March, is an excellent chance to coordinate with other unions already striking, and build towards a full programme of coordinated strike action across the NHS.

1 February, with 500,000 workers taking action, was a great start. But widening this out, involving NHS workers, nurses, posties, rail workers and others would show the power of the working class and could bring down the Tories.

the Socialist

formerly **Militant**

Issue 1212
2-8 February 2023

DO YOU HAVE NEWS FOR US?

The Socialist is written, read, sold and bought by ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people and Socialist Party members. We want you to write for the Socialist.

Send us reports of your workplace and community campaigns, short letters on working-class issues, or ideas for other articles.

CONTACT US

editors@socialistparty.org.uk
020 8988 8777 - ask for the editors

DEADLINES

Friday before publication, or Monday morning for urgent news, unless otherwise agreed with the editors.

The Socialist goes to press on a Tuesday night. We publish online on Wednesday and in print on Thursday.

SUBSCRIBE

to the Socialist for weekly working-class news, analysis and fighting strategy socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe

- Paper subscription £4.50 a month, or £6.50 including Socialism Today
- E-subscription £2.50 a month, or £4 including Socialism Today

SOCIALISM TODAY

our monthly Marxist magazine socialismtoday.org

- Paper sub £3 a month, e-sub £2.50

SOCIALISM: THE PODCAST

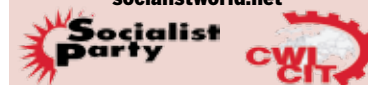
on all major podcast platforms

FOLLOW US

facebook.com/CWISocialistParty
Instagram @SocialistPartyCWI
YouTube - Socialist Party
Twitter @Socialist_Party

SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International socialistparty.org.uk socialistworld.net



BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS

Socialist Books: our publishing house socialistbooks.co.uk
Left Books: Marxist classics bookshop leftbooks.co.uk

OUR NEWSPAPER TEAM

Editor of the Socialist : Editorial staff
Josh Asker
socialistparty.org.uk : Scott Jones
Mark Best : Ian Pattison
Circulation manager : Paula Mitchell
Chris Newby : Mark Best

ISSN 1366-9621

Published by Socialist Publications,
PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT
Registered as a newspaper
at the Post Office
Printed by trade union labour
at Reach Printing Services

Militant issue 1: October 1964
The Socialist issue 1: 7 February 1997

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

Tories reject help for women suffering during menopause



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSOON

ALEXIS EDWARDS
HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

"Menopause leave rejected as it 'could discriminate against men'. These were the types of headlines the media spewed out following a parliamentary report on Menopause in the workplace.

'Menopause leave' was only one of the 11 out of 12 recommendations that the Tory government rejected, either entirely or in part. Yet this, probably the least significant of the recommendations, is the one the media chose to highlight.

In fact, the report includes some vital, well-overdue recommendations. Most urgently needed is a programme of education and awareness, not least within the medical profession.

Up to now, menopause has been an 'optional extra' in doctors' training. Far too many women continue to be diagnosed and treated for anxiety and depression, rather than their symptoms being recognised as the onset of the menopause.

However, the recommendation "that the Royal College of General Practitioners makes training on menopause a mandatory aspect of continuing professional development requirements for GPs" and "in the meantime, all GP surgeries should ensure that at least one member of their clinical staff has received specific training around menopause" was only accepted in part. In effect kicking this into the long grass, and clearly showing no genuine commitment to addressing this situation.

Similarly, an element of this recommendation covers the need to develop high-quality training for teachers, to equip them with the knowledge to include menopause in relationship, sex and health education to all pupils. The government response to the issues of schools amounts to a lot of waffle: "As part of this work, we will consider the need for menopause resources" - another fob-off!

Another vital element of the recommendations is that of prescription charges. It highlights the need to remove dual prescription charges for oestrogen and progesterone and advocates the provision of 12-month prescriptions.

While the government claims to be committed to reducing the cost of HRT (hormone replacement therapy) prescriptions and working to develop a bespoke prepayment certificate, it rejected the recommendation for 12-month prescriptions "because this could have a detrimental impact on the current supply situation for HRT medicines". This opens up the whole question of the role of the pharmaceutical industry, and the need for nationalisation and for free access to all healthcare, including prescriptions, and democratic planning and control of a fully public NHS.

There is only one recommendation in the report that the government supports in full - to "bring forward legislation before the end of the current parliament to make the right to request flexible working a day-one right for all employees." Sounds good, eh? But when we mean better working hours, the Tories are talking about zero-hour contracts! Like parents' right to request flexible working, there is nothing to guarantee requests will be granted.

Sickness-absence procedures are designed as nothing more than a sacking tool. Menopause-related should be treated in the same way as pregnancy, and be discounted from sickness-absence calculations.

Trade unions have a crucial role to play in organising to ensure that adequate workplace policies on menopause exist and are implemented in practice.

The Tories' rejection of proposals for menopause leave as 'discriminatory' is a typical, dishonest divide-and-rule tactic. It's a distraction from the acute need to improve life for all of us, and ultimately the need to end the capitalist system that continues to fail to meet our needs.

Hundreds of child refugees go missing Decades of cuts to blame

CALLUM JOYCE
OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

Over 400 children seeking asylum in the UK have gone missing from government-run hotels used to house incoming refugees, since 2021. Over 200 of the missing children have still not been located. Refugees are often targeted for kidnapping by criminal gangs, or taken to work off the debts they owe to human traffickers.

Sadly, that a scandal like this has been allowed to happen is not surprising. Over a decade of Tory cuts has pushed social care and housing services to breaking point, unable to provide adequate support and safeguarding for those who need them most.

In an attempt to distract from the criminal neglect of public services, and a refusal to do anything that threatens the profit margins of their mates in big business, the Tories use anti-refugee rhetoric, attempting to stir up division, trying to pit working-class people in competition

with each other for jobs, homes and services.

The Tories are responsible for neglecting these children's safety. Labour councils that have meekly passed on Tory austerity - running down social care services and failing to build the council homes needed, share in responsibility too.

The collective wealth of UK billionaires now stands at over £653 billion. Even a fraction of that money could be used to fully fund the NHS, invest properly in social services, provide free school meals, and fund a mass programme of council house building to provide high-quality, affordable housing.

Rather than listening to more government excuses about a 'lack of money', we need to organise to take control of the resources that exist and put them to use in the interests of the working-class majority. That means building a united movement of the working class to fight for jobs, homes and services for all.



Refugee Rights Campaign PHOTO: MARY FINCH

Weak and divided Tories shaken by 1 Feb mass strikes All out together on Budget Day Prepare for a 24-hour general strike



WHAT WE THINK

Wednesday 1 February marked a significant step forward in the growing strike wave to protect workers' living standards, working conditions and rights. Teachers organised in the NEU joined striking rail workers in Aslef and RMT, civil servants in the PCS union, and UCU university staff, around half a million workers in the biggest united day of strike action in the battle so far.

On the picket lines, marching together in cities and towns throughout England and Wales - this was an impressive display of unity and resistance. Workers could feel the power they have when they come together and collectively organise to fight back.

It was a taste of the further united action that will be necessary to win decent pay rises in the face of the cost-of-living squeeze, to resist the attempt to drive down conditions in the workplace to intolerable levels, and to defeat the latest vicious Tory anti-union laws that are being rushed through parliament.

Striking workers can sense that the Tories are lashing out from a weak and vulnerable position. The Tories may be under 'new management' with Rishi Sunak, but none of the chaos and bitter in-fighting from the Boris Johnson and Liz Truss eras has gone away.

Ex-Tory chairman Nadhim Zahawi's dodgy tax dealings show that the stench of sleaze and cronyism is still hanging around. The economy is on the brink of recession and is in the worst position of all the major capitalist economies - even Russia. While the NHS is on life support, with hundreds of people dying every week because of delays, and staffing and bed shortages, right-wing Tory MPs, desperate to cling on to their seats in the next election, are clamouring for tax cuts for the rich!

The Tories are still riven with splits and divisions over everything. Seeing the wide support that striking workers have, especially, but not only, in the NHS, some Tories have been calling for a few crumbs more for nurses. But chancellor Jeremy Hunt has resisted, terrified that any improved offer to the nurses would just harden the determination of other public sector workers and open the floodgates to more strike action.

So they are just sitting it out, paralysed, fingers crossed that strikers



Socialist Party placards on the 18 June TUC demo PHOTO: TOMMY LIVERPOOL

will gradually be worn down, support will wane, and action will eventually be called off.

This is precisely the time to push forward and take the strike movement to the next level. Five unions striking together nationally on 1 February was an important first step. But still only a minority of unions which have been involved in strikes or have mandates for action came out on that day. Imagine the effect if all the unions with live ballots were to coordinate to come out together.

Firefighters have voted overwhelmingly for strike action. 6 February is likely to be the biggest strike in NHS history.

Unlike the pensions strikes in 2011, this strike wave is spanning the public and the private sector. Even previously unorganised workers in Amazon have joined the action, with GMB members in Coventry walking out over their derisory 50p wage rise.

Stronger striking together
A coordinated 24-hour strike of all workers in dispute would not just be an impressive show of strength, but potentially could bring this hapless Tory government down.

There has been reluctance from some union leaders, especially RCN nurses' union tops, to coordinate with other unions for fear that their particular pay struggle could become 'diluted'. But ordinary nurses on the picket line instinctively understand that we are much stronger by all striking together.

The latest 'minimum service' anti-union law, which will effect workers in health, transport, fire and rescue,

education, border security and nuclear decommissioning, clearly shows the need for stepping up coordinated action.

Some unions are looking to 15 March, the day Hunt will be presenting the Tory budget, for the next day of strike action. All the unions with mandates for action need to urgently come together to discuss striking together on that day as the next stage towards a 24-hour general strike.

A national demonstration, on the weekend before or after 15 March, could pull together not just striking workers but all the tens of thousands who want to fight the cost-of-living squeeze, save the NHS, defend the right to organise and protest, and get rid of this rotten Tory government.

But clearly, workers can have little faith that a future Keir Starmer government will act in their interests; the same Starmer who punished his frontbench MPs for speaking out on picket lines and jetted off with shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves to hobnob with the rich elite at the World Economic Forum in Davos. He's already made it clear that placating 'the markets' - code for the rich and powerful - is more important than

paying workers the wage rises they need to keep up with inflation.

Workers need to build their own political party that stands firmly in their camp against the attacks of the bosses and the capitalist politicians of all colours, at local and at national level.

A starting point would be standing workers' candidates in the local elections in May and in the next general election. This is due by the end of next year, but could arrive much sooner given the feeble state of this Tory government.

On Saturday 4 February, the national conference of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition takes place (see pages 8-9) to prepare for a political challenge at the elections - discussing a programme of fighting the cuts, supporting workers in struggle and defending our public services.

The immediate task is to unite the strikes to win the battles on pay, conditions and rights. But if only a fraction of those on strike were to put themselves forward as workers' candidates, this would help lay the groundwork for building the mass political party that workers will need on their side in the important battles to come.

SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

February issue includes...

- Britain on the boil: Perspectives for the economic crisis and class struggle
- The fight for trade union unity
- 20 years after the Iraq war began
- socialismtoday.org/subscribe / 020 8988 8777
- Paper subscription £13 a month, e-subscription £2.50



Privatisation and 'virtual wards' no fix

ANDREW BROMHALL
RETIRED NHS WORKER, SWANSEA
AND WEST WALES SOCIALIST PARTY

Nearly every day we hear news reports on the state of the NHS. Accident and emergency departments at breaking point, ambulances queuing outside for hours with crews unable to offload seriously ill, vulnerable patients. The present Tory government would have us believe that the NHS is broken beyond repair and can only be rescued by comprehensive 'reforms' which, if they have their way, would entail the wholesale privatisation of services. Their vulture-like cronies are waiting in the wings to take advantage of multi-million pound contracts to provide 'improved outcomes' for beleaguered NHS patients.

Health secretary Steve Barclay has

recently announced plans for the NHS to treat 50,000 patients in 'virtual wards' at home.

He says this will cut ambulance response times and pressures on A&E. His department has stated that "urgent community response teams" will be created and will provide patients with "home support" within two hours of discharge from A&E. This is a short-sighted, knee-jerk reaction doomed to failure. No new money has been earmarked to support it, without which recruitment of extra staff to provide this service will be nigh on impossible.

It is suggested that patients who have serious illnesses such as acute respiratory and cardiac conditions, and the frail elderly, be cared for at home - patients who would be cared for much more safely within a hospital environment.



We need real wards not virtual ones PHOTO: ALEXCC

6 FEB: STRIKING TOGETHER TO SAVE OUR NHS



The Socialist Party fights for:

- Strike together - build on 6 Feb NHS strikes, and join others out on strike on Budget Day, 15 March
- Immediate inflation-proof pay increases for all NHS and social care staff. Bring outsourced workers in-house on NHS pay, terms and conditions
- Fully fund our NHS, paid for by taking the wealth off the super-rich
- End privatisation, scrap PFI debts - bring private health facilities into the NHS with no compensation to the fat-cat owners
- Reinstate student bursaries and scrap tuition fees
- Tories out, and no trust in Starmer's Labour. Build a new mass workers' party
- A socialist NHS and care system, democratically run by elected and accountable committees, including service users and workers
- A socialist planned economy to end inequality and oppression

Mental health nurse: 'Stop handing money to profiteers, fully fund our NHS!'



Kick out the privatisers! PHOTO: MARY FINCH

JODIE, MENTAL HEALTH NURSE

Underfunding in mental health services, together with a fewer available staff to deal with an increasing number of users, has put huge pressure on the workforce and left mental health trusts struggling to staff services safely.

Mental health teams work with patients who are relapsing and in mental health crisis, often unable to admit them as there are no psychiatric beds available. Patients wait days for a mental health assessment.

Official figures show that there has been a 30% reduction in the number of beds available in mental health trusts since 2009.

Often, we have no choice but to care for patients at home, leaving them extremely vulnerable. Nurses are left emotionally drained, facing sleepless nights worrying for their

patients' safety. They are leaving the profession in increasing number because of the effects of 12 years of deliberate underfunding by the Tories.

Meanwhile, profiteers who own mental health hospitals are overcharging for private beds. Private hospitals, funded by the NHS, make huge profits providing inadequate services. According to the Care Quality Commission, 40% of private hospitals are rated inadequate.

From the ridiculously low funding NHS mental health services receive from the Tory Government, 27% is directly handed over to private providers.

In the UK, 40% of Mental Health Trusts have staffing levels below established benchmarks. Waiting lists are disturbingly high and the numbers of mental health referrals are bigger than ever.

There is a significant decline in

the number of applicants for nursing courses - down 30% - because of the cost of university and the real-terms reduction in salary for qualified nurses. Shockingly, a newly qualified nurse will graduate with an average debt of £80k. I trained in 2011 and received a bursary of £500 a month and all my university fees paid.

We need to continue to fight for our rights, not only for ourselves but for our patients.

I say: abolish tuition fees, end student debt, and restore education as a universal public good. Fund the NHS properly and stop pumping money into inadequate private hospitals.

When Rishi Sunak tells us there's no money, remember his £7.3 billion tax giveaways to his mates in the banks. If the government can afford handouts for the rich, it can afford to properly fund our NHS!

Liverpool NHS underfunding puts patients 'at risk of harm'

Strikers say: Coordinate the dates!



Unison NHS picket line in Liverpool PHOTO: LIVERPOOL.SP

STRIKING NHS WORKER IN LIVERPOOL

Like the rest of the country, the NHS in Liverpool is in dire straits.

Patients were "at risk of harm" in the emergency department at Aintree hospital, according to a report by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in October 2022.

The same report also concluded that Aintree's emergency department had exceeded its capacity and that patients were being treated on corridors. This also rings true for the newly opened Royal Liverpool Hospital. Patients line the corridors of A&E with some waiting up to two days for a bed. The new hospital has 45 less beds than the old one, which also had problems with overcrowding.

The CQC report stated that staff treat patients with compassion and kindness but recognised the challenge to free up beds while not being able to discharge patients due to insufficient social care or community support. Nursing staff are overworked, underpaid and put under immense pressure due to the huge lack of staff. Many have left or are on

long-term sickness due to the pressures of working through the Covid-19 pandemic and stress in general.

NHS staff are striking over pay, but also as part of the fight for the NHS as a whole. Decades of deliberate underfunding and mismanagement have led us to this crisis. We have been left with no other choice but to go on strike, to fight for the pay rise we deserve. An above-inflation rise would help stop the flood of workers leaving and start to attract new workers into the NHS.

In Liverpool, this winter has seen Unison, RCN and GMB members take industrial action. Staff have felt pressured into crossing each others picket lines as the different unions have gone out on different dates. One recurring talking point in the workplace and on the picket line is why aren't the unions coordinating strike dates?

That's why the 6 February strikes, involving Nurses in RCN alongside ambulance workers, is a big step forward.

The workforce has the appetite to fight. We are fighting to make sure that the union leaders show the same determination!

Reporting from the NHS picket line

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS REPORT FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

Physiotherapists

"Never been on strike before, wasn't sure what it would be like, but I've never seen so many physios in the same place at the same time as on this picket line!"

Most of the physiotherapists at Rotherham hospital had not been on strike before. The steward for the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists (CSP) had been worried that only he and the regional officer would be on the picket line, so was over the moon with nearly 60 of the 90-odd CPS members turning out. And they were bowled over by the support from NHS colleagues, especially passing ambulances, and from the public.

Physios at City Hospital, Birmingham, said: "Notice how it's all the key workers going on strike - we were the ones who kept things running during the pandemic, not the bankers!"

"We're not just striking for ourselves, but for people coming into the profession."

"I only qualified last month, but if I don't take a stand now this is going to affect me for the next 40 years."

Ambulance workers

Socialist Party members in West Yorkshire visited Unison picket lines at the Wakefield ambulance station, Richmond Hill ambulance station in Leeds, and the Yorkshire Ambulance Service headquarters.

There was growing anger at the Tory government's failure to grasp the crisis in the NHS and are lurching from scandal to scandal. A photo of pickets in Maltby, near Rotherham, with a handmade banner saying: "Rishi - we'll belt up when you pay up" - referring to Sunak's fine for not wearing his seat belt, was doing the rounds on the strikers' WhatsApp.

Pickets told us their horror stories of waiting times at hospitals: just the



Physios picket line in Birmingham PHOTO: NICK HART

week before, one striker had done a 12-hour shift before having to wait an extra four hours at a hospital to hand over a patient. Others talked about a crew that arrived at a hospital in the morning only to hand over the patient in the evening!

There was optimism that, with RCN nurses and GMB ambulance workers' strikes coinciding on 6 February, all NHS workers could strike together in the near future.

Nurses

The RCN picket line at the Christie Hospital in Manchester was very well attended during both days of the latest strike action. Despite the snowy weather, nursing staff stood resolutely for fair pay and safe staffing, cheered on by colleagues coming out on their breaks and passers-by shouting messages of support. Multiple nurses told us that, while the Tories' treatment of them has been utterly insulting, they fear a Labour government under Starmer may not do much better. Our strike bulletins were received warmly and the suggestion of standing anti-austerity, pro-working class candidates was greeted with enthusiasm.

'Terrifying and horrific' destruction Support the strikes to save NHS from Tories

JUDITH BYRNE
WEST MIDLANDS SOCIALIST PARTY

I worked for the NHS for 40 years, and since retirement have campaigned relentlessly to save it from Conservative governments. I have watched their deliberate destruction of the NHS over many years, as a clinician and while accompanying relatives to appointments.

But in November 2022, I became seriously unwell myself and was admitted to a hospital built under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI).



Queues of ambulances waiting to drop patients off at hospitals have become the norm PHOTO: PAUL MATTHESSON

I was relieved and surprised when paramedics arrived within minutes to stabilise my condition and transfer me to hospital. Once we arrived we had to wait in the ambulance for four hours; thankfully the paramedics were able to administer pain relief. I actually found myself feeling guilty about occupying an emergency ambulance, despite being in a pretty bad state.

Corridors

Once inside A&E I was with about 15 others in a corridor for seven hours. Staff moved us around on trolleys regularly to access in-use cupboards, apologising every time - it wasn't their fault!

The experience was utterly awful, and absolutely not the fault of clinicians. Everyone appeared stressed, rushed and miserable. Back when I was working, a hospital in the

condition I observed would have been given a poor hygiene rating. Cleanliness was a selling point of PFI when it was introduced!

On one day of my stay there were 92 waiting for beds - three wards worth of patients! During my stay I was informed that a new extension is reaching completion, being built onto the existing A&E. But who will work in it? There is an extreme lack of nurses and doctors. Just increasing the bed capacity is not the solution, there has to be staff to work there too.

I have witnessed the slow, deliberate running down of our NHS by Conservative governments since the 1980s. And in Labour's time, the expansion of PFI loading the service with mountains of debt. The speed of this current destruction is terrifying and horrific.

Support the NHS strikes, save our NHS from Tory wreckers.

Historic Amazon workers' strike Courageously standing up to bosses' intimidation

COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

At one minute past midnight on the morning of Wednesday 25 January, Amazon workers at the BHX4 site in Coventry walked out. This was the first official strike action against Amazon anywhere in the UK. It was a courageous step for dozens of night-shift workers, many of whom had never been involved in trade union activity before, to strike against an employer notorious for victimisation and brutal tactics aimed at smashing worker organisation.

At midnight they downed their tools in the warehouse. Then they marched along a bridge in full view of bitter managers who have been part of a long campaign of anti-union intimidation. They left the warehouse, passed a reinforced security team on a long misty walk-out of the car park, and started a 24-hour strike.

When they got outside, they were greeted by a crowd of jubilant trade union activists and supporters, including a team from Coventry Socialist Party. GMB Amazon rep Darren Westwood told us that, in that moment, "I was in tears". Many of the lay reps didn't hold back their joy.

The work to build

It has taken a lot of effort to get to this stage. Darren and another rep told us how a vicious regime had been set up in the warehouse to fight working-class organisation. Darren said, when issues are raised, "Amazon won't speak to us. Instead, they clamp down and bring in more security and cameras".

The other rep described a "pressure-cooker environment", with managers whose main qualification is their ability to intimidate. Union activists, and virtually anyone who speaks up, face intimidation and trumped-up charges of low productivity, with a threat of dismissal.

When a friend asked Darren if he felt like a robot working at Amazon, he said: "No, because they treat their robots better than us!"

Combine that with language barriers across a diverse workforce, alongside many workers not even knowing what a union is, and we get an idea of the immense challenges union organisers have faced.

Despite all their efforts, Amazon bosses could not hold back the rising anger and confidence of its workers. The insulting 50p an hour pay rise in August was the final straw, especially when Covid lockdowns resulted in Amazon getting even more contracts and more profits.

Unofficial walkouts last summer BHX4 was one of the sites where workers took spontaneous protest action immediately after the 50p rise was announced. Union membership at BHX4 grew sharply, from just 30 to reportedly over 300 in GMB.

The union balloted for strike action in October, which unfortunately narrowly failed to meet the 50% threshold demanded by the Tories' repressive anti-union laws. So the workers balloted again and, on 16 December, succeeded! Then they built and organised for the action, overcoming all the obstacles to achieve a historic strike.

One rep linked it to local history: "This is a first, here in Coventry. Lady Godiva. Tom Mann, Frank Whittle, the Specials - and now our strike!" Another said: "Today has changed the narrative of what workers will accept".

The picket organisers also asked for support at 4-8am and 4-8pm when shift changes occur, with a rally at 6pm. The Socialist Party attended with bulletins celebrating the strike. During the shift changes, more workers were convinced to refuse to cross the picket line; around 50 were reported to have turned around.

Despite the bitter cold, the evening



Midnight: workers bravely walk out Greeted by trade unionists and Socialist Party members, including Dave Nellist, TUSC chair and former Labour MP PHOTOS: COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY



Strikers read the Socialist Party bulletin



rally was attended by hundreds more trade unionists and supporters, including a delegation from Coventry RMT rail union.

Embolden the fight

The organisers are absolutely right to celebrate this important step in fighting Amazon bosses for the decent pay and conditions the workers deserve.

But they are well aware there could be a bitter fight ahead, as they face down an employer well practised in attacking trade unions. Already there are reports of workers who went on strike being marked as 'no-shows' by management, sparking fears they could be disciplined for their legal and democratic action.

On 25 January, 300 Amazon workers took strike action out of a UK workforce of 75,000. But it's clear that Amazon's bosses - as well as those of other big businesses - are worried those few could inspire the rest. The task for unions organising workers in Amazon and across the industry is to turn that fear into reality.

Bringing Amazon workers into coordinated strike action alongside other sections of the working class would strengthen and embolden the fight against low pay, grim working conditions, and austerity, and against the idea that bosses and their politicians can make us pay for the crisis of capitalism.

Library workers in Hackney, east London, are continuing their strike action against huge cuts proposed by the Labour council, on 1 and 3 February. The action involves members of both Unison and Unite unions.

HACKNEY UNISON SAYS:

"This is a direct consequence of management's failure to address any of our concerns over their proposed new library structure, which does away with 20 frontline staff, requires working one in seven Sundays, removes fixed tea breaks, and will create a very stressful environment.

"The following comment from a frontline member of staff sums up the current situation: 'The lack of understanding, by managers, about the daily routines and timetabling

beggars belief really. Are they expecting us to be negotiating classes, events, shelving, cashing up, logging on, lunches, floor-walking, office time, displays and tea breaks between ourselves on a daily basis?'

"All our alternative proposals made over the last four months have either been ignored or brushed aside. Management, with all their resources, have failed to come forward with any new proposals.

"This is a Labour council which is rubber-stamping compulsory redundancies and imposing a poor work-life balance on library staff.

"Our last strike day demonstrated who is essential to run the library service. Hackney Central library was closed all day, despite them having five managers on site with combined salaries of close to £300,000!"

Hackney libraries: Labour council cuts 'beggar belief'



Brian Debus, chair of Hackney Unison and Socialist Party member, addresses the strikers HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

RMT members discuss the way forward Fight on and coordinate on Budget Day!



Birmingham New St picket BIRMINGHAM SP

MIDLANDS RMT MEMBER

Around 120 members turned out on a cold Monday night in Birmingham on 23 January to hear an update on the national rail dispute from the RMT union leadership.

There was a clear fighting mood and every member was angry that, after nearly 20 days of strike action and overtime bans, the employers are still determined to strip us of our terms and conditions.

We were addressed by both the national president and Midlands national executive member, before

general secretary Mick Lynch briefed the meeting on where we were up to with the dispute.

Mick made it clear that the latest atrocious proposals from the employers' Rail Delivery Group were totally unacceptable and should be rejected. There was some debate over whether to even put it to a referendum first.

Mick added that he thinks there needs to be coordination of all the strikes. He announced that he will be writing to the general council of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) calling for them to organise a 24-hour

general strike, which was greeted with enthusiastic applause.

The RMT should help lead the way, by taking action with the teachers and other unions on 15 March, Budget Day. That would land a huge blow against the Tories on the day the government announces its budget.

A Socialist Party member proposed the date from the floor of the meeting and met with a good response from other RMT members.

The sooner we tell the employers to bin their most recent offer and we name the next strike dates the better.

Firefighters to join strike wave

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) strike ballot has delivered a whopping 88% 'yes' vote on a 73% turnout, smashing through the Tory anti-strike threshold.

Members have rejected a 5% pay 'offer' - in reality a significant pay cut for workers who risk their lives daily. The FBU reports that since 2010, firefighters have faced a 12% pay cut in real terms, and about 20% of firefighter jobs have been cut.

According to Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, no strike dates have been set yet. The government and employers have been given until 9 February to make a new offer. But if that doesn't happen, there will be national strike action on pay by firefighters for the first time since 2003.

For firefighters, like ambulance workers, nurses and other public sector workers, striking is a last resort forced by the Tories' and bosses' brutal policies. They have concluded they have no other choice in order that they continue to work and to defend the essential service they provide.

The result will be a big boost to all those NHS staff, teachers, rail workers, postal workers and others already on the front line of the strike wave. It adds another group of workers to the long list taking on the bosses and the Tories - which will be even more strengthened by all striking together.



FBU lobby parliament as part of the pay campaign LONDON SP

UCU model motion Join others on 15 March

The University and College Union (UCU) has announced 18 days of action in universities as part of its ongoing disputes over pay and conditions, and pensions.

These dates include 16 and 17 March, but do not include 15 March - Budget Day, when NEU has scheduled a nationwide teachers' strike

and demonstrations in London and Cardiff.

Socialist Party members in UCU will be campaigning for further days of coordinated action, including calling on the UCU leaders to amend the strike timetable to include striking on 15 March. The following is a model resolution.

This branch notes:

- The significant impact of the 1 February strikes, with five trade unions taking action nationally, including UCU, as part of their own timetables of substantial industrial action
- The potential of other trade unions also in national disputes, to join further days of coordinated action, in addition to those involved on 1 February
- That NEU has announced 15 March, the day the Tory government is set to announce its budget, as a nationwide teachers' strike, to be accompanied by demonstrations in London and Cardiff

This branch believes:

- Coordinated action is a powerful tool, to be used alongside a timetable of escalating strike action
- That UCU should do all it can to work with other campus trade unions, Unison and Unite, to discuss strategy and coordinate strike action where possible, maximising impact
- That another day of wider coordinated nationwide strike action would be a show of strength of the trade union movement, and show further opposition to new anti-trade union laws

This branch resolves:

- To call on the UCU leadership to modify the existing timetable of action to include 15 March as a strike day, in addition to or as an alternative date in the existing strike calendar
- To call on the UCU leadership to publicly appeal to other trade unions to also strike on 15 March
- To back further coordinated action beyond 15 March

Sheffield UCU branches take historic action

ALISTAIR TICE SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY


In a historic first, all four branches of the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) in Sheffield have taken strike action. As well as members at both universities (Sheffield and Hallam) joining the national strike on 1 February, teaching staff at the Sheffield Further Education College took their second day of strike action over last year's pay claim.

And lecturers at the International College University of Sheffield (ICUS) resumed strike action for four days, after the privately owned Study Group withdrew elements of

an already rejected, well below-inflation pay rise.

This aggressive management action is in response to the first-ever strike of UCU members in a privately run higher education institution. The Study Group corporation, which runs the outsourced contract to teach international students on behalf of Sheffield University, is clearly worried that unionisation and strikes will spread to its other colleges, and wants to teach ICUS staff a lesson.

All it has done is anger the staff even more. They have now voted for a full five-day week-long strike from 13 February if an improved offer isn't forthcoming.



NSSN national online public meeting
After 1 February strike
How do we all strike together?
6pm Monday 6 February
 Meeting ID: 871 6695 2312 Passcode: 060223

Get all the latest union news... **with the NSSN bulletin** shopstewards.net

The annual conference of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) takes place on Saturday 4 February. TUSC was set-up in 2010, co-founded by the then general secretary of the RMT, the late Bob Crow, along with the Socialist Party and others. Its aim was to enable trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists, of any party or none, to stand candidates against the pro-austerity establishment parties under a common umbrella. The Socialist interviewed the TUSC national election agent and Socialist Party executive member **Clive Heemskerck** on some of the key issues up for discussion at this year's conference.

THE CONFERENCE TITLE, 'STARMER'S HEADING FOR NUMBER TEN, SO WHAT SHOULD WE DO AT THE GENERAL ELECTION?' HAS BEEN ANSWERED BY SOME PEOPLE SAYING, 'DON'T STAND, BECAUSE YOU WILL LET THE TORIES IN.' WHAT'S YOUR RESPONSE TO THAT?

What is clear about the next general election is that, whatever the exact outcome between the parties is, the next government will be led by politicians – whether it is Rishi Sunak or whoever is the Tory leader then or, more likely, Sir Keir Starmer – who defend the free market, capitalist big business system. While there may be some variation in how they do it, whoever is in Number Ten will put the interests of that system first at the expense of the working class. No one, I think, can seriously doubt that now.

But that wasn't so in 2017 and 2019 when Jeremy Corbyn led the Labour Party, with his denunciation of 'the rigged system'. That was so even though the election manifestos didn't include the measures of democratic nationalisation of the financial system and the major monopolies – the 'commanding heights' of the economy – that would have been necessary to enable Corbyn's promises to be successfully implemented against the capitalists' sabotage. But a Corbyn victory would have undoubtedly opened up the chance to break with the status quo.

So TUSC didn't stand candidates in 2017 or 2019 and instead campaigned for a Corbyn-led government; while calling for the deselection of the right-wing majority within the Parliamentary Labour Party, Starmer included, who we warned would do everything possible to undermine a Corbyn administration.

But the situation is completely different now and the whole working class movement needs to prepare for the battles that will come under a Starmer government carrying out the capitalists' demands. And if it is possible to get even a small bloc of workers' MPs elected unbound by the Labour whips, who could then become a pole of parliamentary opposition to Starmer's inevitable Tory-lite austerity policies, then that's what should be done.

And actually that would be achievable if steps were taken now by the left-led trade unions to establish a new workers' party; or if even a couple

of the fighting trade unions organised their own list of independent working-class candidates for the next election. With the cost-of-living battle they are conducting against the bosses and the government, their authority is such that a parliamentary breakthrough would be entirely possible.

BUT WOULDN'T TRADE UNIONS STANDING CANDIDATES RISK LETTING THE TORIES BACK IN?

Many workers will be genuinely fearful of another Tory victory but we shouldn't accept that as a justification for failing to stand trade union candidates.

For a start – and it's an obvious but often forgotten point to make – under Britain's electoral system a general election is not one all-UK-wide contest but 650 different elections to elect an MP in each constituency. So, for example, in the Islington North constituency, Jeremy Corbyn, who Starmer is clear will not be able to stand as a Labour candidate but who won in 2019 with 64.3% of the vote (with the Liberal Democrats second), could stand for a trade union-organised list. How would a vote for Corbyn in Islington North be 'letting the Tories in'?

And how do those who repeat the 'vote Labour or be a Tory enabler' mantra – the less genuine, less honestly concerned cyber-trolls especially – deal with the fact that in 91 constituencies, overwhelmingly Tory held, the Liberal Democrats were in second place at the last election? Wouldn't a Labour vote in those seats 'let in the Tories'? Should the unions back the Lib Dems there? Of course not – so clearly every constituency contest has its differences.

Since its formation, TUSC, in both local and parliamentary elections, has not stood against left-wing Labour candidates who have been prepared to resist the austerity consensus; and a new workers' party or a workers list for the general election would almost certainly not contest those seats where a genuinely left-wing candidate has managed to be selected.

But the fundamental point is that the trade union movement, and the working class generally, should not be drawn into a stage-managed auction between different varieties of capitalist politicians seeking votes but should have its own candidates to support. A government majority of workers' MPs is not on the agenda at this moment; but the possibility of getting a block of MPs to represent our class in parliament is, if the left-led unions take the necessary steps.

WHAT IF THERE ISN'T A TRADE UNION ELECTION LIST ORGANISED IN TIME? WHAT IS THE TUSC STEERING COMMITTEE PROPOSING SHOULD BE DONE THEN?

This has been considered by the steering committee since we began detailed discussions on the next general election, launched with a briefing document last June (available on the TUSC website at www.tusc.org.uk/txt/475.pdf). We agreed that a TUSC list could not be anywhere near as authoritative as a trade union-organised electoral challenge with the potential involvement of Jeremy Corbyn – or have the same prospects for success – but that there still needs to be a 'Plan B'.

So we organised a series of public discussion meetings under the heading 'Enough is Enough! But what do we do at the ballot box?' to provide an open forum to debate how to achieve the biggest possible trade

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition pre-conference interview

'IF YOU'RE STANDING ON A PICKET LINE, WHY NOT STAND AT THE BALLOT BOX TOO?'



The press launch for TUSC's 2015 general election campaign when 135 candidates stood under the TUSC banner
PHOTOS: PAUL MATTISSON

union, socialist, environmentalist and anti-austerity election challenge. This started in October 2022 and saw successful meetings organised in 23 towns and cities – although that still leaves lots of places where meetings could be organised in the coming weeks and months, including constituency follow-up meetings to an earlier city-wide or regional event.

We made an appeal to over twenty campaign groups and socialist organisations inviting them to join the discussion, from the former Labour councillors in Liverpool now sitting as Community Independents in the council chamber; to the Aspire group of councillors in Tower Hamlets, who won their seats in May 2022 standing

against the local Labour Party's austerity agenda; to campaign organisations like Enough is Enough, Don't Pay UK, Just Stop Oil, The People's Assembly, and Acorn. And socialist groups like the Breakthrough Party, the Socialist Labour Network (the 'Labour-in-exile' group), the Northern Independence Party, Left Unity, the People's Alliance of the Left (PAL), International Socialist Alternative UK, the Socialist Labour Party, the Communist Party of Britain, and the Socialist Workers Party. The Workers Party of Britain, meanwhile, now has observer status on the TUSC steering committee.

We suggested a target of 100 seats, which qualifies an electoral list for 'fair

media coverage' from the broadcasting authorities (15% of the 650 seats), including a party election broadcast, coverage of a manifesto launch, and so on. It does not, of course, mean genuinely fair coverage in the establishment media but meeting the 15% threshold gives far greater leverage in negotiations with individual programme editors, local radio and TV, and the print media too, marking out a serious electoral campaign.

SOME OF THOSE GROUPS LIKE BREAKTHROUGH AND LEFT UNITY HAVE COMMITTED TO SEEKING A 'NON-AGGRESSION PACT' AT THE ELECTION, TO AVOID LEFT-WING CANDIDATES STANDING AGAINST EACH OTHER. ISN'T THAT A POSITIVE STEP?

TUSC actually already has such an arrangement for local elections with Breakthrough and Left Unity so really, unfortunately, a 'clash avoidance' agreement for the general election is not nearly ambitious enough. The 'fair coverage' issue is a clear example of that.

The broadcasting authorities only recognise candidates for the purposes of the 'fair coverage' threshold who appear on the ballot paper using the name of a political party registered with the Electoral Commission, or one of its registered 'descriptions'. Standing as an Independent or under the name of different political parties registered with the Electoral Commission would not count, even

if the parties or individual candidates declared their alignment with other candidates, whether in a 'non-aggression pact' or a mutual endorsement agreement.

None of the organisations have suggested that they are realistically planning to stand 100 candidates on their own (which would cost a minimum of £50,000 to pay the legally required £500 election deposit for each seat). Some are locally based – not covering enough seats to reach the threshold on their own – while others have had a very limited electoral presence. In the May 2022 local elections, for example, there were 271 candidates, members of different socialist organisations and none, who stood under the TUSC name, but just 37 other left-of-Labour candidates (not counting Aspire) standing for five different registered parties.

So not only Left Unity and Breakthrough but all the socialist organisations TUSC sent our appeal to have to seriously address the question. Would half-a-dozen or so separate lists of maybe tens of candidates without any guaranteed media access have more impact than one list of 100 or so candidates with 'fair media coverage' rights?

SO WHAT'S THEIR SOLUTION?

Good question! TUSC has a clear model to maximise electoral unity between separate organisations which meant, in the 2015 general election for example, that there was a list of 135 candidates appearing on the ballot paper with one or other of the TUSC registered descriptions next to their name.

TUSC is constituted so that members of different groups or parties who use a TUSC description have the guaranteed right to run their own election campaign, including promoting their own organisation as they so wish in election material, social media campaigning etc. The only provision is that the individual candidate accepts a minimum core policy platform for the relevant election – which, for the next general election, we will be discussing at the conference.

Actually the 2015 general election, and the local elections held on the same day – in which, combined, the TUSC candidates polled 118,125 votes – was a good example of how inclusive this TUSC 'federal model' is. There were candidates from seven different parties using a TUSC description on the ballot paper, including nine Left Unity members as parliamentary candidates, all thereby contributing towards the 'fair coverage' threshold.

There was not a single complaint made at the time or since by any of the different parties involved, about the election broadcast or any perceived restrictions on the ability of their candidates to promote their own organisation, or its policies where they went beyond the TUSC minimum platform.

The TUSC model is one that works and if others don't like it and are serious about organising the most impactful possible general election campaign, they really need to say what their alternative is. The TUSC door is always open.

In the meantime I hope that TUSC supporters will push on with their campaigning within the trade unions for a workers' challenge at the election; continue the open 'what do we do at the ballot box' discussion meetings; and, where there are local

elections this May, organise the biggest possible number of candidates to stand.

THE CONFERENCE CLOSURES WITH A SESSION ON THE TUSC CORE POLICIES FOR THE MAY LOCAL ELECTIONS, UNDER THE HEADING 'A SOCIALIST RESPONSE TO THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS: BUT IS THERE REALLY ANYTHING COUNCILS CAN DO?'

Absolutely! Councils are responsible for over one fifth of all spending on public services, and with regulatory powers in other areas. The core policy platform for this year's elections includes a list of emergency measures which councils could take – they have the powers to act now – that would make an immediate difference to millions of peoples' lives.

These include extending the opening of public buildings, including libraries, to provide staffed warm spaces and youth facilities; funding kitchens in schools and other services to introduce free breakfasts, lunches and evening meals; using council licensing powers to cap rents, including for students, and stopping the eviction of those who fall into cost-of-living-related arrears; an emergency programme of home insulation to cut energy bills...

BUT WOULDN'T A COUNCIL JUST GO BANKRUPT IF IT DID THINGS LIKE THAT?

No, it's not as simple as that. Councils in Britain cannot go bust in the same way as a private company can, like the Flybe airline for example, which just ceased providing its services. Only an act of parliament can shut down a local authority and the functions it exists to carry out.

That makes council finances implicitly underwritten by the government, which is why, to maintain some central control, local authorities are legally required to set a 'balanced budget' each year before they can issue council tax bills, set service charges etc. But the legal position still leaves significant discretion in the hands of councillors over their authority's borrowing capacity (and council reserves) – in other words, what counts as a 'balanced budget'. So much so, that the Tories are currently legislating for extra powers, in the so-called Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill, to come into effect this summer.

But even then councils will still have enormous power. Labour-led administrations alone, in 125 councils across Britain, control between them spending power of at least £82 billion and hold around £20 billion in usable reserves (which could be used to finance borrowing). They could open up a second front against the Tories in the cost-of-living fightback tomorrow – which would be unstoppable if, for example, Starmer and the shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves pledged that, on entering Number Ten, they would reimburse councils for any emergency steps they took now!

But again we come back to the same question, which the 1 February strikes made so clear. Where is our movement's political voice, making such a case?

Everyone who has been standing on the picket line to fight the cost-of-living crisis should consider standing against the cost-of-living crisis at the ballot box too, starting in May's local elections. Nobody else will do it for us!

Come to Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition conference

• Saturday 4 February, 11am-4.30pm, Room B34, Birkbeck College, Malet Street, WC1E 7HX

Why I joined the Socialist Party – to put socialist ideas into action



JOHN WILLIAMS
CARDIFF SOCIALIST PARTY

To explain why I joined the Socialist Party, I have to explain some of the events in my life. One of my earliest memories was seeing the devastation of the 9/11 attacks on TV. I didn't fully understand what was going on but I knew something big had happened that would change the world. I watched news bulletins of British and American soldiers being killed in Iraq and felt the world was a dangerous and violent place.

Both my parents worked, yet were constantly in debt. Me and my sisters were always answering doors to debt collectors or hiding from them. It became obvious to me from an early age that working people from day one are screwed over, however hard they work.

The deep inequality in the schooling system opened my eyes to the unfairness working-class people face. The school I went to was great, with a reputation of being friendly, open and mutually respectful. Unfortunately, it was a victim of forced academisation under Gordon Brown. Most of the teachers were sacked and replaced.

I felt alienated and depressed, trying to figure out who I was and where I fitted in, and why the world was like this. I didn't think this would change.

But at university, I heard what Jeremy Corbyn, then leader of the Labour

Party, was saying - ending cuts and privatisation, for public ownership, taxing the rich etc. I was inspired. Then I came across the Socialist Party after seeing Corbyn speak at a rally in Cardiff. Its members were friendly, open and keen to speak to people. The first meeting I went to was on International Women's Day and I was welcomed. I could speak my mind and was never talked down to.

Over the next few weeks and months, I was impressed by the weekly meetings that discussed a broad range of topics. It was clear to me that it was a democratic organisation.

What convinced me to join was the willingness to put their ideas to the test, by doing weekly stalls, getting involved in campaigns, and discussing with workers and young people. I remember after going to three meetings, being asked to help leaflet the Port Talbot steel works where jobs were under threat. It was inspiring. I was impressed with how serious they were.

Seeing the Socialist Party in action made me realise how an understanding of socialist ideas is key to convincing more people of the need to fundamentally change society, and the need to join the Socialist Party to fight for this change.

During the Corbyn years, I wasn't always sure of the Socialist Party's approach to the Labour Party. But it was Socialist Party members who

defended me when I was witch-hunted out of Welsh Labour for passing a motion demanding Labour councillors refuse to pass on Tory cuts. The Socialist Party was clear and consistent in what would have been necessary for Corbyn to successfully implement his programme and to defeat the right-wing saboteurs within his own party.

After Corbyn's defeat, I knew I was with the right organisation. The Socialist Party remained optimistic about the power of the working class, and the potential for the popularity of socialist ideas to grow.

I am now confident to boldly put forward socialist ideas using everyday language in in whatever forum or discussion I'm in - on protests, on picket lines or with people I work with.

Joining this party has been the best decision of my life. I encourage you to get in touch and see what role you can play. We have a world to win.

Join the fightback
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- Visit: socialistparty.org.uk/join
- or call **020 8988 8777**
- or text your name and postcode to **07761 818 206**

to find out more today!

Meeting hears from socialists fighting across the world



PHOTO: MARK BEST

ISAI MARJERLA
SOCIALIST PARTY BLACK AND ASIAN GROUP

The 'Struggle for world socialism' public meeting, organised by the Black and Asian group of the Socialist Party, was truly a show of international working-class solidarity. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), an international organisation of workers, young people and those fighting for a socialist world.

Speakers from Sri Lanka, South Africa and Nigeria joined workers and youth in London to discuss the world capitalist system in crisis, the fightback taking place, and the programme and ideas needed to change the world.

Deji Olayinka, Socialist Party England and Wales, chaired the meeting and introduced it by outlining the horrifying conditions facing the masses across the world - unemployment, poverty, and environmental destruction. And some of the struggles taking place against them.

Sirtunga Jayasuriya, General Secretary of the United Socialist Party (CWI in Sri Lanka) kicked off the meeting with his first-hand report of the tremendous mass movement in Sri Lanka against the government over the last year. A member of socialist organisations since 1964, he also contested the Sri Lanka presidential election in 2005 and came third. He described the uprising in Sri Lanka as revolutionary, it showed the power of the people and the determination of

the masses to come out against corruption and repression.

Weizmann Hamilton, General Secretary of the Marxist Workers Party in South Africa, explained the rotten role of the ANC government and the weak and incompetent opposition. He brought the lessons of the 2012 historic uprising of South African mineworkers in Marikana and the aftermath of the brutal shooting of striking miners by police. Key in South Africa is fighting for a mass workers' party on a socialist programme as a real political alternative for the masses.

Pelad Adewale brought greetings from the CWI in Nigeria. He is the National Organiser of the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM). Nigeria, Africa's largest economy, is in an acute economic crisis - suffering and misery is faced by the masses. With inflation at more than 20%, people are struggling to cope with the rising cost of living.

Points were made that the eyes of the working class across the world are on the strike wave taking place here. Workers winning pay rises would be an inspiration for those fighting against the bosses in their own countries.

As Pelad concluded, only a complete reorganising of society, putting the wealth in the hands of the working class, can solve the many crises facing people across the world. The CWI is fighting across the world for socialism. Join us if you're not already a member.

Reopen leisure centres in Kirklees – Bring Kirklees Active Leisure in-house

IAIN DALTON
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Just before Christmas, Kirklees Active Leisure (KAL), announced the 'temporary' closure of two leisure centres at Batley and Deighton, and the swimming pool at Colne Valley leisure centre - stating that it was due to cash flow problems following the pandemic and the increased cost of energy bills. This was stated to be a temporary closure until March, when the decision would be reviewed, with no guaranteed reopening.

Campaigns in each of these areas have been set up. Kirklees Unison, representing leisure centre staff, has launched a physical and digital petition to the council demanding the centres are reopened and that KAL, a charity set up to manage leisure centres by the council, should be

brought back in-house to save the jobs and services.

These demands were prominent on a recent 150-strong demonstration in Huddersfield organised by Enough is Enough and attended by some of the campaign groups, who had already held a lobby of the council earlier that month.

Socialist Party member Angie Waller spoke at the demonstration as the recently elected Secretary of Kirklees Unison. She expressed solidarity with ongoing strikes and called for a 24-hour general strike on Budget Day, 15 March. Angie also demanded that action be taken to save jobs and bring KAL back in-house. If the council pleads poverty to avoid doing so, they should send the bill to the government and in the meantime use their reserves and borrowing powers to protect jobs and services!



YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Support for the NHS in Bromsgrove



BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

CHLOE LESLIE
BIRMINGHAM SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

On Saturday 28 January Socialist Party members held a stall in Bromsgrove supporting NHS workers on strike, calling for coordinated strike action. Over the course of two hours we were able to speak to plenty of people who agreed with the fact that nurses and NHS staff are more than deserving of a fair inflation-proof pay rise. We spoke to many people who were vehemently opposed to the privatisation that has been and is taking place throughout the NHS.

Compared to previous stalls we have had here in Bromsgrove, this

was the most successful yet, raising over £60 for the Socialist Party fighting fund.

Many locals stopped to speak to us and took time out of their day to sign the petitions, even if they were in a rush. With the overall changing attitude of people across the country in support of the strikes, I believe that we will see an even greater increase in support for workers on strike not only in the NHS but in all other sectors as well.

Help fund the fightback
DONATE
socialistparty.org.uk/donate

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2023	DEADLINE: 30 MARCH 2023
Wales	1,467	2,300		64%
South West	731	1,800		41%
North West	382	1,150		33%
Northern	163	750		22%
Yorkshire	542	2,550		21%
London	925	4,600		20%
West Midlands	444	2,600		17%
Southern & SE	352	2,350		15%
East Midlands	247	1,850		13%
Eastern	52	1,200		4%
Other	1,699	3,850		44%
TOTAL	7,005	25,000		28%



SAVE NOTTINGHAM LIBRARIES

Nottingham library campaign victory

DES CONWAY
SAVE NOTTINGHAM LIBRARIES

I have been following with interest the Hackney Library workers struggle against Labour-controlled Hackney Council (see page 6).

Well, here in Nottingham, our community campaign against the Labour-controlled city council to defend three libraries earmarked for closure has ended with an undoubted victory.

The Save Nottingham Libraries campaign ran a year-long battle to keep open three libraries in some of the most deprived areas in the city.

Nottingham City Council originally announced the closure of the three libraries in January 2022, and we immediately established our community campaign. We have been active ever since, energising citizens, library users and local creatives in support of these inner-city facilities, including an open letter to council

leader David Mellen by 100+ local authors and poets.

The city council executive board, which met on 17 January, was lobbied and attended by the campaign. It confirmed that all three libraries will now remain open, although some will have opening hours reduced. We raised objections to the 42.5-hour total reduction in opening hours, but the main objective from the outset was keeping the libraries open and that has been achieved. Once a library or leisure centre closes it rarely gets re-opened, and that community facility is lost forever.

The council papers rightly ruled out the volunteer-led service delivery model - an excellent outcome for the staff affected, avoiding a two-tier system. Nottingham City Council rightly condemned central government cutbacks to the authority since 2010, amounting to more than £300

million in lost revenue. However, rather than leading a fightback, the council passes on its own version of austerity measures to local residents. One of my slogans in letters sent to the local paper was "Less compliance, more defiance" but sadly that's not likely to happen any time soon.

Finally, can I give a 'shout-out' to the Socialist Party members (especially Gary and Jean) who attended many of the campaign events throughout the year-long battle.

They have also supported two recent community campaigns alongside myself and others - Save John Carroll Leisure Centre and the Reverse Mobility Pass campaign.

Unfortunately, despite the campaign, John Carroll Leisure Centre was closed by the council. But because of the campaign, the council executive board reinstated 24/7 travel for all mobility pass holders in February 2020. As the Meatloaf song goes: "Two out of three ain't bad".

Rallies around the country to save our NHS

Rallies took place in support of the NHS across the country on 28 February demanding the resources the health service needs, which Socialist Party members attended.

LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

200 people attended a street rally organised by Save Our NHS Leicestershire as part of a national day of action called over the crisis in the NHS and in support of striking health workers.

The rally, chaired by Socialist Party member Steve Score, was supported by the local Trades Union Council, Unite Community and Enough is Enough Leicester. Speakers included local health workers, and trade union reps.

Several speakers drew the link between the staffing shortage in the NHS and the fight for decent pay, and that the money does exist to restore the cuts in living standards and to properly fund the NHS. From the vast profits of the oil companies to the huge rise in wealth owned by the billionaires and the tax evasion of the likes of Zahawi who "carelessly"

set up offshore accounts and didn't pay millions in tax, examples were given of where the money could come from.

The campaign plans a big public meeting on 4 March to hear the case on "how the NHS can be fixed for patients and workers".

Steve rounded up the rally by saying that the massive, coordinated strike action planned for 1 February could be a starting point to build for a 24-hour general strike to fight the cost-of-living crisis and for a properly funded NHS.

Local Blairite MP Hilary Benn's criticism of Tory privatisation was met with: "What about Wes Streeting's comments" and shouts in support of Corbyn.

We then marched to the British Medical Association (BMA) junior doctors' protest. One doctor there said they'd never clear the 7.1 million waiting list while staff were underpaid and leaving the profession.

KEVIN PATTISON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Over 100 people joined a demonstration across the road from the site of the proposed new Leeds Children's Hospital, one of those promised in the Tories' 2019 manifesto.

However, the only funding so far received by the Trust was to demolish the old buildings and prepare the site. No work to build anything has been started.

Local Blairite MP Hilary Benn's criticism of Tory privatisation was met with: "What about Wes Streeting's comments" and shouts in support of Corbyn.

We then marched to the British Medical Association (BMA) junior doctors' protest. One doctor there said they'd never clear the 7.1 million waiting list while staff were underpaid and leaving the profession.

Like what you've read?
SUBSCRIBE TO THE SOCIALIST
socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe



WHAT WE STAND FOR

Capitalism is an ailing, crisis-ridden system based on the exploitation of the majority of the world's population by a small, super-rich elite who own most of the wealth and the means of producing it. This way of organising society, in which the pursuit of profit comes before everything else, causes poverty, inequality, environmental destruction, wars and oppression across the globe.

The Socialist Party organises working-class people to fight against the attacks from this rotten system on our lives and livelihoods, and for a socialist alternative: a society which takes the wealth out of the hands of the super-rich and is democratically run by working-class people to meet the needs of all not the profits of a few.

Building fighting democratic trade unions in the workplaces and a new mass workers' party is a vital part of the struggle to change society along socialist lines.

Because capitalism is a world system, the struggle for socialism must also be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International which organises across the world. Our demands include:

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

- A £15 an hour minimum wage for all, without exemptions. For the minimum wage to automatically increase linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is higher.

- Share out the work. A maximum 32-hour working week with no loss of pay or worsening of conditions. The right to flexible working, under the control of workers not employers. An end to insecure working, for the right to full-time work for all who want it; ban zero-hour contracts.

- All workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness, parental and holiday rights from day one of employment. End bosses using bogus 'self-employment' as a means to avoid giving workers rights.

- No to austerity through inflation. For all wage rates to be automatically increased at least in line with price rises.

- Open the books of all companies cutting jobs or claiming they can't afford to pay a real living wage. State subsidies, where genuinely needed, for socially-useful small businesses.

- For trade unions independent of the capitalist state, with members having democratic control over their own policies, constitutions and democratic procedures. For all trade union officials to be regularly elected, subject to recall by their members and paid a worker's wage.

- Reduce the state retirement and pension age to 55. For decent living pensions.

- Replace universal credit and the punitive benefit system with living benefits for all who need them.

PUBLIC SERVICES

- A massive expansion of public services including the NHS and council services. Reverse all the cuts, kick out the privateers. Bring private social care and childcare facilities into public

ownership under democratic control, in order to provide free, high-quality services for all who need them. Expand services for all women suffering violence.

- For local councillors who are committed to opposing austerity and all cuts to local services, jobs, pay and conditions.
- For a socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs, including dental and eye care – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out the private companies! Nationalise the pharmaceutical industry under democratic workers' control and management.

- Renationalise privatised utilities – including rail, mail, water, telecoms and power – under democratic workers' control and management.

- Free, publicly funded and democratically run, good-quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees and write off student debt, end marketisation, and introduce a living grant. No to academisation. For all schools to be under the genuine democratic control of local education authorities, school staff, parents and student organisations.

- The right to a safe secure home for all. For the mass building of genuinely affordable, high-quality, carbon-neutral council housing. For rent controls that cap the level of rent. Fair rent decisions should be made by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and representatives of trade unions. For cheap low-interest mortgages for home buyers. Nationalise the privately owned large building companies, land banks and estates.

- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

ENVIRONMENT

- Prioritising major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels and nuclear power with renewable energy and ending the problems of early obsolescence – where products are designed to 'wear out' and be replaced and unrecycled waste.

- Nationalisation of the energy companies, under democratic workers' control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need, in order to carry out a major switch to clean, green energy, without any loss of jobs, pay or conditions.

- A democratically planned, massively expanded, free to use, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

- For a major, publicly funded, insulation and energy transition plan for existing housing stock.

- Agribusiness to be taken into democratic public ownership. For a food processing and retail industry under workers' control to ensure that standards are set by consumers, small farmers; and

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
- or call 020 8988 8777
- or text your name and postcode to 07761 818 206

to find out more today!

Help fund the fightback!

DONATE TODAY

socialistparty.org.uk/donate

all workers involved in the production, processing, distribution and retail of food.

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

- For united working-class struggle to end discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice and oppression.

- Repeal the anti-trade union laws and all others that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest and to strike! End police harassment. For the police to be accountable to local committees, made up of democratically elected representatives of trade unions, local community organisations and local authorities.

- For the right to choose when and whether to have children – for the right to access abortion, contraception and fertility treatment for all who need it.

- For the right to asylum – with democratic community control and oversight of emergency funding resources. No to racist immigration laws.

- Expand democracy. For the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. For all MPs to be subject to the right of recall by their constituents at any time, and to only receive a worker's wage.

- For proportional representation and the right to vote at 16.

- For the right of nations to self-determination. For an independent socialist Scotland and for a socialist Wales, both part of a voluntary socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.

- Oppose the dictatorship of the billionaire owners of the media. For the nationalisation of newspaper printing facilities, radio, TV and social media platforms. Access to these facilities should be under democratic control, with political parties' coverage being allocated in proportion to the popular vote at elections.

- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!

- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.

- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.

- No the EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!

- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.

- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.

- No the EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!

- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.

- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.

- No the EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

Steel – nationalise to save industry “a whisker away from collapse”

Unite the Union has said that the UK steel industry is “a whisker away from collapse”. And now there is a stand-off between the steel companies and the Tory government, affecting over 30,000 that work in the industry.

In its heyday in the 1970s, the British steel industry employed 320,000 workers. Almost 300,000 well-paid, skilled, industrial jobs have disappeared since the 1970s.

Now there is a funding gap of hundreds of millions of pounds to maintain what remains of the industry. And the Tory government is only offering bailouts for steel companies on the condition that they decarbonise and introduce more sustainable technology and practices. But Tory privatisation removed state power to direct industry practices.

Why have these corporations been allowed to get away with extracting profits while consistently failing to



editors@socialistparty.org.uk

or, if you're not online, write to the Socialist Inbox, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

sustain industries that were privatised, only surviving by falling back on state handouts?

Only with state-owned industry, democratically controlled by the working class, can we create an environmentally sustainable steel industry, with well-paid, skilled jobs – and other industries of the like.

DEAN YOUNG, LIVERPOOL



Port Talbot steelworks PHOTO: PHIL BEARD/CC

Learning about strikes

I try to speak honestly with my children about current events. Recently we've been speaking about teachers going on strike, and the upcoming dates of action. I have explained that it is everyone's right to decide whether or not they want to go on strike and that should be respected, and the reasons why someone might make their decision either way.

If I'm being honest I didn't think they were really listening to me, past the “you may have to have a day off school” part. However it turns out after a word from a teacher at my daughter's school that my daughter and her friend ran up to them at breaktime asking how much teachers get paid, is that enough for the work they do, and will they be going on strike. The interest, understanding and empathy from these two nine-year-olds has made me very proud!

SHELLY



Liverpool bins, cleansing and grounds maintenance workers strike on pay

Mount a fight for the funding we need

DAVE WALSH
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

Unite the Union members who work for Liverpool Streetscene Services Ltd (LSSL) started a five-day strike on Monday 23 January over pay. LSSL is an arm's length company, wholly owned by Liverpool Labour council. It provides refuse collection, street cleansing and grounds maintenance services.

The workers were offered the same settlement as local government workers, which is a £1,925 flat-rate, consolidated payment. But many of the workers are on a rotating shift pattern and are required to work weekends and bank holidays, which boosts their salary. Others have an HGV licence or are skilled workers. So the local government offer equates to 6-7%, well below the rate of inflation. And after years of funding cuts and real-terms pay cuts, there was no mood to accept another reduction.

Workers at LSSL were originally privatised under Blair's Labour government, to a myriad of different contractors. Senior bosses and shareholders at these companies did very well, while the workforce suffered attacks on pay and conditions. In 2016, the Labour council brought them under one umbrella company, owned by the council, because they weren't getting value for money from the contractors. But instead of bringing



LSSL picket line PHOTO: DAVE WALSH

them back into direct employment - which we demand - they set up LSSL. This means many cannot join the Local Government Pension Scheme, creating a two-tier workforce.

Unite members are a minority at LSSL, with about 60 members. The GMB union is much larger, with over 600 members, but the local GMB leaders recommended acceptance of the pay offer.

Management have tried to exploit this situation, moving vehicles away from the main depots in Liverpool to avoid picket lines and keep the operation moving. But many GMB members have been unwilling to do anything that undermines the strike. Unite pickets were posted to where they were needed as soon as they got information on management tactics.

The strikers also organised protests

outside the town hall at a Labour group meeting, and then two days later at a full council meeting where they expressed frustration with the Labour council for their lack of support. Many council workers are angry that government commissioners have been sent to the city to oversee the implementation of £73 million of cuts this year.

The Tories' excuse for sending

commissioners to Liverpool was based on Max Caller's report on council corruption, but this comes from a government bogged down by sleaze and corrupt cronyism, and this hasn't been lost on the people of the city. If Labour made this argument and fought against Tory cuts, they could build a massive working-class movement in Liverpool, as Labour did in the 1980s when it was led by the Militant Tendency.

Since 2010, when Labour took control in Liverpool, they have cut over £450 million from the city's annual budget. They have slashed vital front-line services like SureStart Centres, youth services, libraries and social services, destroying 7,000 jobs in the process. So it's not a surprise that they are sitting on their hands while these latest cuts are implemented.

However, a small group of Labour councillors broke the whip, refusing to vote through further cuts. They have been expelled or left the party. These councillors have now committed to stand as independents, and they have held discussions with Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) activists to avoid standing against each other.

The government has also changed local ward boundaries to reduce the number of city councillors, and all councillors will be up for election this year for a four-year period instead of elections each year for a third of wards. A number of Labour councillors have been told they have not been selected as candidates. Not surprisingly the ones who have been selected are the most reliable for the party leadership.

A political vacuum exists in the city which can only be filled by building a mass workers' party with a programme of socialist policies capable of resolving the many crises faced by working-class people. Anti-cuts candidates in the local elections, pledged to fight for the funding for jobs, pay and services we need, will be a step along that road, and give a political voice to striking workers.

Government's flawed Grenfell advice and Enfield campaigners' fire safety staircase victory

PAUL KERSHAW
CHAIR UNITE HOUSING WORKERS BRANCH, LE1111

The fire at Grenfell Tower was supposed to be a watershed moment but change has been slow or non-existent; dragged out of government by hard-fought campaigns.

Tory minister Michael Gove has conceded that flawed government guidance contributed to the cladding crisis. Of course, this has been clear to all for a long time. Residents of blocks with cladding, whose lives are blighted by safety concerns, the threat of huge bills and often an inability to sell, will be looking for action not words. It was a significant step but stopped short of making the obvious link to decades of deregulation by all governments since Margaret Thatcher.

There has also been an important local victory for campaigners in Enfield, where the Labour council reversed its earlier decision and stopped planning approval for a number of new highrises with a single staircase fire escape.

Senior planning officers were presented with special 'Christmas presents' as part of the campaign: copies of the book Show Me the Bodies: How We Let Grenfell Happen (see review in February 2023

Socialism Today) were presented to them with publicity. The book shows how public bodies and politicians facilitated profit-hungry corporations in dodging safety regulation.

Britain is almost unique internationally in not banning single-staircase highrises. Two escapes are important so that firefighters can get in with their equipment while residents get out. Grenfell had just one stairway.

Regulations

It is telling that over five years since seventy-two people lost their lives, the government is only now 'consulting' on new regulations for fire escapes. In Enfield, a Labour council was so keen to support developer profits that it was prepared to go against the advice of the local fire brigade and common sense to proceed.

Local campaigners and trade unions, including the Unite housing workers branch, came together to fight for safety. They also challenge building residential towers of largely unaffordable housing in developments such as the troubled Meridian Water regeneration, where truly affordable social-rented homes are desperately needed.



Campaigners in Enfield force a council U-turn PHOTO: ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SP

30 years since the Timex dispute: 'From lambs to lions'

29 January marked the thirtieth anniversary of the start of the historic 1993 battle of Timex workers in Dundee. The almost eight-month-long dispute was the most significant industrial struggle in the history of the city. The actions of these courageous workers have important lessons for today, when mass trade union struggle is needed more than ever. We carry here an edit of an article written by Socialist Party Scotland member **Jim McFarlane**, whose mum Laura was a member of the Timex strike committee.

The Timex Corporation had been in Dundee since 1946, and generations of Dundee families had worked there over the years, including my own. At its height, 5,000 workers were employed at three different sites across the city.

In December 1992 the company proposed to lay off up to 150 workers, nearly half the workforce, for a period of six months. Management handpicked union activists to be among those laid off. A ballot for strike action resulted in a 92% vote in favour. Requests by the engineering workers' union, AEEU, for negotiations were ignored by the company, and on 29 January the workers began all-out strike action.

Locked out

Despite an offer to return to work to negotiate, management responded that any return to work was dependent on the workers taking a pay cut and massive cuts to their pensions. When they refused, the entire workforce was locked out and sacked. But Timex Corporation had seriously underestimated the determination of this predominantly female workforce.

Timex attempted to use the courts to enforce the Tory anti-trade union laws, to ensure the strikers were restricted to having six people on their picket line. This was defied by the strikers arguing that their picket lines were in fact mass meetings and demonstrations.

In March 1993, a demonstration of 10,000 marched through city centre streets. Trade unionists came from across Britain.

At a mass picket the following Monday, the open collaboration between Timex and Tayside police was exposed for all to see. As the scab workforce buses were forced through an angry and determined picket line, the police indiscriminately arrested noisy but peaceful pickets. All those arrested, despite not being found guilty of any crime, were handed exclusion orders and banned from going anywhere near the factory.

Massive support

There was a conscious attempt in the media to portray the strikers and their supporters as troublemakers. But the strikers had overwhelming support from the working class of Dundee and right across the country, clearly expressed through the donations of money, food and clothing that flooded in.

Despite opposition and obstruction from the national AEEU

leadership, the local leaders played a positive role. As well as continuing to picket the factory, the strike committee and wider sacked workforce developed a mass boycott campaign of Timex products and those shops that sold them, as well as any local business that supplied goods to the scab factory.

Strike committee

The strike committee sent delegations to speak to meetings of workers across Britain and all over the world. Speakers went to Ireland, Norway, France, and to the Timex headquarters in the United States, among others. They came back with messages of support and financial aid.

In April, another mass picket was turned into a partial city-wide strike, as a 6,000-strong crowd of workers from other Dundee workplaces marched to the factory gates and then took part in a demonstration.

In May, the statutory 90-day sacking notice was due to expire, and Timex would be free to rehire some of its sacked workers. This was an attempt to break the unity of the strikers. At a mass meeting, the strikers made it clear that no one was going back unless they all were on the same terms and conditions as they were when the dispute began.

On 17 May, one of the largest pickets Scotland had ever seen took place. 5,000 people assembled. Production in the scab factory ground to a halt. Timex and the police had secretly arranged for the scab buses to arrive 90 minutes earlier than normal. The police stopped buses of trade unionists who had travelled from all over the country on the main roads leading to Dundee.

Despite this, the road leading to the gate of the factory was blocked by pickets and it took the police over 20 minutes to force it 50 yards into the factory. All the while, more and more pickets were arriving. The police were forced to concede that they were unable to get scabs in cars and vans through, and they were turned away.

One-day general strike

Through their own experience, and through discussion with socialists such as Scottish Militant Labour (SML - the forerunner of Socialist Party Scotland), the strikers wanted to transform the overwhelming support they had from other trade unionists into concrete action, in the form of a one-day general strike.

Through pressure from below, the Scottish Trades Union Congress



Some of the coverage in the Militant, forerunner of the Socialist

(STUC) was pushed into calling an all-Scotland shop stewards conference to discuss what support could be given. This was cut short when discussion turned to the calling of a one-day general strike, as the leadership feared the Tory anti-union laws could be used against them.

Speaking at a Militant Labour Rally at Wembley Conference Centre in London in June 1993, Sandra Walker, a Timex striker, said: "We need national trade union support. If our forefathers had listened to talk about legality, we'd have no trade unions".

The national leaders of the AEEU and STUC did little to build wider strike action. In contrast, the strikers had fought this multinational to a standstill.

The factory manager was forced to resign as he was unable to deliver a pliable non-union factory to his bosses in the United States.

John Kydd Jnr, local AEEU convenor, said early on in the dispute that there could only be two possible outcomes: the full reinstatement of all workers, or the factory would have to be closed, as a non-union scab factory would not be tolerated.

The failure of national trade union leaders to organise the much-needed solidarity strike action meant the dispute reached a stalemate.

The willingness to continue fighting among the strikers was still strong. The company were forced to concede they could not win, and the factory closed in August 1993. The strikers and local union leaders had given their all for eight months, but had to accept redundancy terms.

30 years later, workers are again being told to accept pay cuts, job losses, and job insecurity. A key lesson is that if 340 workers in Dundee could take on and fight to a standstill a huge corporation like Timex, along with their allies in the police and the media, just think what a 24-hour general strike involving all workers could achieve.

Build fighting unions

A key task is to build fighting democratic trade unions at local and national levels, alongside the building of a new mass workers' party that can represent the interests of working-class people.

Sandra Walker said: "Women are at the forefront of this struggle, and have changed from lambs to lions." My mum, Laura, was on the strike committee after working in the factory for 20 years. Before those events, she would never have seen herself travelling the country speaking to audiences of hundreds about their

battle and calling for solidarity action. Many others would say the same.

It's important to take up the idea in some capitalist media that the overwhelmingly female workforce was somehow just puppets of male trade union reps and officials. Officials, both local and national, were men, but there were women shop stewards, and the strike committee was made up from the whole workforce, with women fully represented.

Scottish Militant Labour

John Kydd Jnr was asked for an honest assessment of the role of SML in the dispute. He commented: "The role of SML in the Timex dispute enhanced the class emphasis of the dispute. Their solidarity, support and encouragement helped to bolster the morale of the pickets... made sure of national recognition, and raised the dispute to greater heights. Those who condemned the support of SML failed to recognise the class nature of the dispute, and by their actions aided and abetted the Engineering Employers Federation and the company".

• This is an extract from the full article at socialistpartyscotland.org.uk

Israel: Mass protests against the far-right, ultra-nationalist government

AMNON COHEN

The new, far-right, ultra-nationalist Israeli government was sworn in in December 2022. It has already provoked unprecedented protests. On 14 January 80,000 took to the streets, despite threats from the national security minister to deploy water cannons against the demonstrators. The following week the number of demonstrators rose to 130,000. On 27 January, Palestinians were killed by the Israeli army in Jenin in the West Bank; nine Israelis were killed in a subsequent terrorist attack in Jerusalem. In the past, such a situation would have led to cancellation of protest rallies. Nevertheless, 170,000 still demonstrated on 28 January.

The Netanyahu administration is the most right-wing government in Israeli history. Netanyahu is actually on the more 'moderate' wing of the ruling coalition, which includes ultra-nationalist, openly racist, and homophobic zealots. His main coalition partner is the Religious Zionist Party headed by messianic, right-wing, religious settlers Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir. Ben Gvir, who has now been appointed internal security minister, used to have a photo on his wall of Baruch Goldstein - a Jewish terrorist who massacred 29 Muslims while they were praying in Hebron. Smotrich, who has been appointed finance minister, is a neoliberal and promises to ban the right to strike in many sectors.

Capitalists fear destabilisation

Capitalists, both in Israel and internationally, are terrified by the rise of this government. This is not because of any democratic sensibilities on their part, but rather their fear that this government is out of their control, and that its provocative actions will pour gas onto the flaming embers of the national conflict, destabilising the situation in Israel and the region, and harming their profits.

Surprisingly, the government plan which has provoked the widest opposition in the media is its proposed reforms to the judiciary, limiting the independence of the Supreme Court and making it subservient to the government, and allowing its rulings to be overruled by a majority vote in the Knesset (Israeli parliament).

Judicial reforms - Netanyahu's 'get out of jail card'

The Supreme Court judges do play a prominent role in Israeli capitalism, as a check for the excesses of elected governments and a supposedly independent arbiter of conflicts. The vast majority of the time, the Supreme Court rules in favour of the government. But occasionally it makes a concession on a secondary issue. The judiciary acts in the interests of the broader capitalist ruling class by, for example, acting to limit the corruption of politicians. A former president, along with a former prime minister, have ended up serving jail



PHOTO: UZI D.

terms. The 'judicial reforms' are intended to prevent the courts convicting Netanyahu of corruption and banning him from office, and these are supported by the right-wing settlers who want a faster process for wholesale expropriation of Palestinian land.

Despite not being deemed by the Israeli state as citizens, Palestinians from the West Bank have the right to appeal against actions of the Israeli state to the Supreme Court. It rules in the state's favour the majority of the time, but occasionally rules against the more provocative actions of the army. It serves to legitimise the acts of repression and expropriation carried out by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), which can claim it is merely upholding law and order. There are enormous illusions in the Supreme Court among the left, and many social struggles end with the deliberations of the Supreme Court. The court serves as a safe conduit for social conflicts, where these are decided by judges and lawyers, with the masses reduced to the role of onlookers.

Massive demonstrations

Despite the intentions of the official organisers of the demonstrations, the judicial reforms were not the key element which propelled 170,000 demonstrators to protest against the government. It was revulsion against the racist and homophobic pronouncements of government ministers along with fear that the government will defund education and social services in order to

channel money to the Ultra-Orthodox communities, turning Israel into a theocratic dictatorship. Most of all, demonstrators feared that the government's provocations against the Palestinians could fan the flames of the national conflict, exploding the region into a new war.

There have been demonstrations of 13,000 in Haifa, 4,000 in Herzlia, 3,000 in Netanya, and smaller demonstrations in other areas. However, the biggest by far have been the 100,000-strong demonstrations in Tel Aviv.

The speakers at the demonstrations were dominated by members of the establishment. These included former prime minister Yair Lapid, former general and defence minister Moshe Yaalon (who pioneered the use of targeted assassinations by the IDF), and Yuval Diskin (former head of the Israel Security Agency) who published an article in Ynet calling for a civil strike to be organised to stop the government. But these pillars of the establishment merely aim to provoke a return to office of the people and policies of the previous government - a government which combined more sustainable and restrained repression of the Palestinians with occasional talk of peace. It supports the defence of the Supreme Court's 'independence' so that it can continue to act as a pressure valve for society, while providing a legal stamp of approval for continued exploitation and oppression by the capitalists. They put forward no alternative other than the Bennet-Lapid

government which ruled Israel in 2021-2022, and the failure of which to improve the lives of workers, and continued national repression, led to its rapid demise, and the return of Netanyahu.

The demonstrators are right to fear that the new government will trigger an explosion of national conflict. This is already beginning to happen, with Israeli armed forces raiding Jenin in the West Bank killing nine Palestinians and wounding scores of others.

Hamas responded by firing missiles into Israel from Gaza, to which the Israeli Air Force responded by bombing Gaza. Consequentially, the Palestinian Authority suspended cooperation with the IDF.

On 27 January a Palestinian terrorist killed nine Israelis in Jerusalem, and the following day, a 13-year-old shot and wounded two Israelis in Jerusalem. Reports on Israeli television showed Jerusalem as a ghost town with the streets empty, and the journalist's report was punctuated by thugs shouting "death to the Arabs!" in the background. There have been reports of dozens of attacks by settlers on Palestinians in the occupied territories. The ethnic violence can escalate and open the way to wider conflicts.

The government has announced that the home of the 13-year-old will be destroyed, a long-standing policy applied to Palestinian families, yet the family home of the Jewish murderer of prime minister Rabin was not touched. It will also make it easier for Jewish Israelis to arm

themselves. Two army divisions will be sent into Jerusalem, and there are plans to change laws to enable workers to be dismissed without a disciplinary hearing if they are deemed to "support terror".

The ascent of the new ultra-nationalist government represents a very serious development in Palestine, Israel and internationally. In order to defeat the government, the protests need to provide an independent working-class alternative that can start to undermine the far right's support. The movement cannot be subservient to capitalist politicians who fear that the new government will harm their profits. It has to put forward an alternative to Netanyahu and Ben Gvir, and this alternative cannot be a return to discredited capitalist parties which were in power last year, and whose failure led to the return of Netanyahu. This requires the establishment of a party which unites the working class, Jewish and Arab, secular and religious, by means of socialist policies, based on their common interests to end the national oppression of the Palestinians, along with the continual assaults on the living conditions of the Israeli working class. The movement needs to reach out beyond the middle-class, secular Tel Aviv centre and build in the working-class areas, and in the development towns.

No section of the capitalists has an alternative to the current ultra-nationalist government. Only the working class, organised in its own independent party can show a way out of the developing nightmare.



£1 / £2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



the Socialist

Issue 1212

2-8 February 2023

formerly **Militant**

Young people won't pay the price of the bosses' crisis

Stand with striking workers



PHOTO: TOMMY LIVERPOOL

ADAM POWELL-DAVIES
YOUTH FIGHT FOR JOBS

Amid a historic cost-of-living crisis, Tory chancellor Jeremy Hunt has confirmed new 'youth rates' for young workers on the minimum wage. From April 2023, 16 to 17-year-olds can be paid as low as £5.28 an hour. Why should the bosses be allowed to pay us less, and pocket extra profit, just because of our age?

Meanwhile, university students are being told to survive with just 2.8% extra maintenance support next year, equating to an 11% cut in the average student's spending power over two years. This would be the steepest drop in students' living standards ever, at a time when 91% are already worried about the cost of living.

And all young people would face the consequences of a new round of cuts and privatisation to public services, including the NHS, schools and libraries.

Fortunately, young people can see a powerful means to fight back. Stirred by continued attacks from the Tories and the bosses, a force has re-emerged in Britain at a level not seen before in our lifetimes: the working-class, organised in the trade unions.

Through a historic wave of

strike action, the trade unions have shown themselves to be on the frontline defending the conditions of workers and young people.

By going on strike, health workers are not just fighting for their own pay rises, but to save the NHS altogether. Education workers are not just striking on pay, but for the funding that our schools and universities need to provide a decent education for all. Workers in rail and mail are fighting to protect their industries for future generations to use and work in.

As part of Youth Fight for Jobs we are campaigning for young people to join and get active in a trade union, to help transform our unions into spaces where young workers can lead struggles and become the next generation of trade union activists.

As the current strike wave shows, when workers organise, unite and fight together, we have enormous power. Imagine what almost seven million workers organised in trade unions across Britain could do to combat all the other miseries of capitalist society - like racism and sexism, inadequate housing, or the climate crisis.

• Read updates from the strike wave on pages 4, 6, 7

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS ▶▶▶ see column on p12



9 771366 962103

ISSN 1366-9621